

The City of Numbered Days

By Francis Lynde

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SYNOPSIS.

Brouillard, chief engineer of the Niquola irrigation dam, meets J. Wesley Cortwright and his daughter, Genevieve, and explains the reclamation work to them. Cortwright sees a big chance to make money, organizes a company and obtains government contracts to furnish power and material. Steve Massingale threatens to start a gold rush if Brouillard does not influence President Ford to build a railroad branch to the place, thus opening an easy market for the ore from the "Little Susan" mine. On a visit to Amy Massingale at her father's mine Brouillard tells her of his need for money to pay off his dead father's debts. She tells him to be true to himself. He decides for the extension. Mirapolis, the city of numbered days, booms. Cortwright persuades Brouillard to become consulting engineer of the consolidated electric power company in return for \$100,000 stock. Stoppage of work on the railroad threatens a panic. Brouillard spreads the Massingale story of placer gold in the river bed and starts a gold rush. The gold rush promises to stop the reclamation project. Amy tells Brouillard that her father has incorporated the "Little Susan" and is in Cortwright's clutches financially. He tells her he has made \$100,000 and declares his love. Amy loves him but shows him that he has become demoralized. Massingale's placer gold find was a fraud, but a real find is made.

Suppose, young man, that the brother of the girl you loved got himself into very serious trouble and that she could be saved much sorrow and he very severe punishment only if you gave up the best job you ever had and cleared out of the state. Would you make the sacrifice?

CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

"I didn't know you could be so convincing," was Miss Genevieve's comment. "It was splendid! Nobody will ever believe that you are going to go on building your dam and threatening to drown us, after this."

"What did I say?" queried Brouillard, having, at the moment, only the haziest possible idea of what he had said.

"As if you didn't know!" she laughed. "You congratulated everybody. And the funny thing about it is that you didn't say a single word about the Niquola dam."

"Didn't I? That shows how completely your father has converted me, how helplessly I am carried along on the torrent of events."

"But you are not," she said accusingly. "Deep down in your inner consciousness you don't believe a little bit in Mirapolis. You are only playing the game with the rest of us, Mr. Brouillard."

Gorman, Mr. Cortwright's ablest trumpeter in the real-estate booming, was holding the plaza crowd spell-bound with prophetic outlining of the Mirapolitan future.

In the middle distance and background the buildings on the opposite side of the plaza, rose the false work of the great dam—a standing forest of sawed timbers, whose afternoon shadows were already pointing like a many-fingered fate toward the city of the plain. But, though the face of the speaker was toward the shadowing forest, his words ignored it. "The snow-capped Timayonis," "the mighty Chirgringo," and "the golden-veined slopes of Jack's mountain" all came in for eulogistic mention; but the massive wall of concrete, with its bristling parapet of timbers, had no part in the orator's flamboyant descriptive.

Brouillard loved Amy Massingale with a passion which, however blind it might be on the side of the higher moralities, was still keen-sighted enough to assure him that every plunge he made in the Mirapolitan whirlpool was sweeping him farther away from her.

He had transferred the power company's stock, minus a single share to cover his official standing on the power company's board, to Cortwright, and had opened an account at the Niquola National. The ninety-nine thousand nine hundred dollars had since grown by speculative accretions to the rounded eighth of a million which all financiers agree in calling the stepping stone to fortune.

He had regarded this money—was still regarding it—as a loan; his lever with which to pry out something which he could really call his own. But more and more possession and use were dulling the keen edge of accountability and there were moments of insight when the grim irony of taking the price of honor to pay an honor debt forced itself upon him. At such moments he plunged more recklessly, in one of them taking stock in a gold-dredge company which was to wash nuggets by the wholesale out of the Quadajen bend, in another buying yet other options in the newest suburb of Mirapolis.

With the waning of the day of celebrations the temper of the street throngs was changing. It is only the people of the Latinized cities who can take the carnival spirit lightly; in other blood liberty grows to license and the thin veneer of civilized restraints quickly disappears. From early dawn the saloons and dives had been adding fuel to the flames, and light-heartedness and good-natured horseplay were giving way to sardonic humor and brutality.

In the short faring through the

crowded street from the plaza to the Metropole corner Brouillard saw and heard things to make his blood boil. Twice before he reached Bongras' cafe entrance the engineer shouldered his way to the rescue of some badgered nucleus of excursionists, and in each instance there were frightened women to be hurriedly spirited away to the nearest place of seclusion and safety.

It was in front of Bongras' that Brouillard came upon Rev. Hugh Castner, the hot-hearted young zealot who had been flung into Mirapolis on the crest of the tidal wave of mining excitement. Though Hosford—who had not been effaced, as Mr. Cortwright had promised he should be—and the men of his clique called the young missionary a meddlesome visionary, he stood in the stature of a man, and lower Chirgringo avenue loved him and swore by him now and then when some poor soul, hastily summoned, was to be eased off into eternity.

When Brouillard caught sight of him Castner was looking out over the seething street cauldron from his commanding height of six feet of athletic man stature, his strong face a mask of bitter humiliation and concern.

"Brouillard, this is simply hideous!" he exclaimed. "If this devil's carnival goes on until nightfall we shall have a revival of the old Roman Saturnalia at its worst!" Then, with a swift blow at the heart of the matter: "You're the man I've been wanting to see; you are pretty close in with the Cortwright junta—is it true that free whisky has been dealt out to the crowd over the bar in the Niquola building?"

Brouillard said that he did not know, which was true, and that he could not believe it possible, which was not true. "The Cortwright people are as anxious to have the celebration pass off peaceably as even you can be," he assured the young missionary, trying to buttress the thing which was not true.

"When riot comes in at the door, business flies out at the window; and, after all, this feast of hurrahs is merely another bid for business."

But Castner was shaking his head. "I can't answer for Mr. Cortwright personally. He and Handley and Schermerhorn and a few of the others seem to stand for respectability of a sort. But, Mr. Brouillard, I want to tell you this: somebody in authority is grafting upon the vice of this community, not only today but all the time."

"The community is certainly vicious enough to warrant any charge you can make," admitted Brouillard. Then he changed the topic abruptly. "Have you seen Miss Massingale since noon?"

"Yes; I saw her with Smith, the cattleman, at the other end of the avenue about an hour ago."

"Heavens!" cried the engineer.

"Didn't Smith know better than to



"Brouillard, this is simply hideous!" take her down there at such a time as this?"

The young missionary was frowning thoughtfully. "I think it was the other way about. Her brother has been drinking again, and I took it for granted that she and Smith were looking for him."

Brouillard buttoned his coat and pulled his soft hat over his eyes. "I'm going to look for her," he said.

Castner nodded, and together they put their shoulders to the crowd. Again and again the engineer and his companion had to intervene by word and blow to protect the helpless in the half-drunken, gibe-flinging crush, and in these sallies Castner bore his part like a man, expostulating first and hitting out afterward in a fashion that left no doubt in the mind of his antagonist of the moment.

"It was little less than a crime to turn your laborers loose on the town on such an occasion as this," said Castner, dealing out his words as frankly and openly as he did his blows.

Brouillard shrugged.

"If I hadn't given them the day

they would have taken it without leave. You'll have to pass the responsibility on to someone higher up."

The militant one accepted the challenge promptly.

"It lies ultimately at the door of those whose insatiate greed has built this new Gomorrah in the shadow of your dam." He wheeled suddenly and flung a long arm toward the half-finished structure filling the gap between the western shoulders of Chirgringo and Jack's mountain. "There stands the proof of God's wisdom in hiding the future from mankind, Mr. Brouillard. Because a little section of humanity here behind that great wall knows the end of its hopes, and the manner and time of that end, it becomes demon-ridden, irreclaimable!"

At another time the engineer might have felt the force of the tersely enunciated summation of the accusation against the Mirapolitan attitude. But now he was looking anxiously for Amy Massingale or her escort, or both of them.

"Surely Smith wouldn't let her stay down here a minute longer than it took to get her away," he said impatiently as a pair of drunken Cornishmen reeled out of Haley's place and usurped the sidewalk. "Where was it you saw them, Castner?"

"They were in front of 'Pegleg John's,' in the next block. Miss Massingale was waiting for Smith, who was just coming out of Pegleg's den shaking his head. I put two and two together and guessed they were looking for Stephen."

"If they went there Miss Amy had her reasons. Let's try it," said Brouillard, and he was half-way across the street when Castner overtook him.

There was a dance hall next door to Pegleg John's barrel house and gambling rooms, and though the daylight was still strong enough to make the electric lights garishly unnecessary, the orgy was in full swing, the raucous clanging of a piano and the shuffle and stamp of many feet drowning the monotonous cries of the sidewalk "barker," who was inviting all and sundry to enter and join the dancers.

Castner would have stopped to question the "barker"—was, in fact, trying to make himself heard—when the sharp crash of a pistol shot dominated the clamor of the piano and the stamping feet. Brouillard made a quick dash for the open door of the neighboring barrel house, and Castner was so good a second that they burst in as one man.

The dingy interior of Pegleg John's, which was merely a barrel-lined vestibule leading to the gambling rooms beyond, staged a tragedy. A handsome young giant, out of whose face sudden agony had driven the brooding passion of intoxication, lay, loose-flung, on the sawdust-covered floor, with Amy Massingale kneeling in stricken, tearless misery beside him. Almost within arm's reach Van Bruce Cortwright, the slayer, was wrestling stubbornly with Tig Smith and the fat-armed barkeeper, who were trying to disarm him, his heavy face a mask of irresponsible rage and his lips bubbling imprecations.

"Turn me loose," he gritted. "I'll fix him so he won't give the governor's snap away! He'll pipe the story of the Coronida grant off to the papers;—not if I kill him till he's too dead to bury, I guess."

Castner ignored the wrestling three and dropped quickly on his knees beside Stephen Massingale, bracing the misery-stricken girl with the needed word of hope and directing her in low tones how to help him search for the wound.

But Brouillard hurled himself with an oath upon young Cortwright, and it was he, and neither the cattleman nor the fat-armed barkeeper, who wrenched the weapon out of Cortwright's grasp and with it menaced the babbling murderer into silence.

CHAPTER XV Quicksands

A short week after the reclamation service headquarters had been moved from the log-built offices on the government reservation to the commodious and airy suite on the sixth floor of the Niquola building Brouillard received the summons which he had been expecting ever since the night of rioting and lawlessness which had marked the close of the railroad celebration.

"Mr. Cortwright would like to see you in his rooms at the Metropole," was the message the office boy brought, and Brouillard closed his desk with a snap and followed the boy to Bongras'.

The shrewd-eyed tyrant of Mirapolis was in his shirt sleeves, busily dictating to two stenographers alternately, when the engineer entered the third room of the series; but the work was suspended and the stenographers were sent away as soon as Brouillard was announced.

"Well," was the millionaire's greeting, "you waited to be sent for, didn't you?"

"Why not?" said Brouillard shortly. "I have my work to do and you have yours."

"And the two jobs are at opposite ends of the string, you'd say. Never mind; we can't afford to throw each other down, and just now you can tell me a few things that I want to know. How is young Massingale getting along?"

"As well as could be expected. Caruthers—the doctor—says he is out of danger."

"H'm. It has been handed in to me two or three times lately that the old man is out gunning for Van Bruce or for me. Any truth in that?"

"I think not. Massingale is a Kentuckian, and I fancy he is quite capa-

ble of potting either one or both of you for the attack on his son. But so far he has done nothing—has hardly left Steve's bedside."

Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright flung himself back in his luxurious swing chair and clasped his pudgy hands over the top of his head where the reddish-gray hair was thinning reluctantly.

"I've been putting it off to see which way the cat was going to jump," he admitted. "If young Massingale is out of danger, it is time to get action. What was the quarrel about, between him and Van Bruce?"

"It occurs to me that your son would be a better source of information," said Brouillard, evading.

"Van Bruce has told me all he remembers—which isn't much, owing to his own beastly condition at the time. He says young Massingale was threatening something—something in connection with the Coronida grant—and that he got the insane idea into his head that the only way to stop the threat was by killing Massingale."

The sandy-gray eyes of the millionaire promoter were shifting while he spoke, but Brouillard fixed and held them before he said: "Why should Massingale threaten your son, Mr. Cortwright?"

"I don't know," denied the promoter, and he said it without finching a hair's breadth.

"Then I can tell you," was the equally steady rejoinder. "Some time ago you lent David Massingale, through the



Brouillard Hurling Himself With an Oath Upon Young Cortwright.

bank, a pretty large sum of money for development expenses on the "Little Susan," taking a mortgage on everything in sight to cover the loan. But when the railroad was an assured fact he learned that the Red Butte smelters wouldn't take his ore, giving some technical reason which he knew to be a mere excuse."

Mr. Cortwright nodded. "So far you might be reading it out of a book."

"In consequence, David Massingale finds himself in a fair way to become a broken man by the simplest of commercial processes. The bank holds his notes, which will presently have to be paid. If he can't pay, the bank comes back on you as his indorser, and you fall back on your mortgage and take the mine. Isn't that about the size of it?"

"It is exactly the size of it. I do want the 'Little Susan' and I've got a good friend or two in the Red Butte smelters who will help me get it."

Brouillard's black eyes were snapping, but his voice was quite steady when he said: "Thank you. That brings us down to the mention of the Coronida grant and Stephen Massingale's threat—which your son can't remember."

"Right-o," said Mr. Cortwright, still with predetermined geniality. "What was the threat?"

"I don't know, but the guessing list is open to everybody. There was once a grant of many square miles of mountain and desert somewhere in this region made to one Don Estacio de Montarriba Coronida. Like those of most of the great Spanish land grants, the boundaries of this one were loosely described and—"

Mr. Cortwright held up a fat hand.

"I know what you're going to say. But we went into all that at Washington before we ever invested a single dollar in this valley. As you may or may not know, the reclamation service bureau tried to choke us off. But when it came down to brass tacks, they lacked a witness. We may be in the bed of your proposed lake, but we're safely on Coronida land."

"So you say," said Brouillard quietly, "and on the strength of that you have been guaranteeing titles. Just there is where Massingale comes in, I imagine. He has spent twenty years or more in this region, and he knows every landmark in it. What if he should be able to put a lighted match to your pile of kindling, Mr. Cortwright?"

Does it occur to you that the argument between Cortwright and Brouillard may end with Cortwright's plotting against the young engineer and sending him to prison on false evidence just to get rid of him? Watch developments.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Lines to Be Remembered.
Our greatest glory consists not in never failing, but in rising every time we fall.—Goldsmith.

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Although Germany has three times as many miles of railway in proportion to area as the United States, she has spent hundreds of millions of marks in the enlargement and improvement of her waterways. What the statesmen of Germany think of the importance of the waterways is shown by the fact that in the midst of the greatest war in all history, when the empire is fighting for its very life, they are not only maintaining and operating the waterways they already have, but are actually building more.

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Maiden Had Asked Mathematical Question, and Really He Had Not Understood Her.

"Mr. Smith, I want to ask you a question," remarked a maiden to her partner as they entered the conservatory.

"A thousand, if you like," he replied.

"What is a kiss?" The young man was taken aback, but quickly pulled himself together and firmly said: "This is."

"Sir," replied the indignant seeker after higher culture, "you misunderstand me. The interrogation I put to you was a mathematical problem which I thought might interest you."

"It does, it does," said the young man, as he twirled his light mustache, "but if it's a conundrum I give it up."

The maiden's eyes sparkled, and there was music in her voice as she threw out the answer "Why, it's nothing divided by two."

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